

A Brief History of the York County Public Library

In July, 1968 the York County Volunteer Association opened the York County Volunteer Library in an old frame house at the intersection of Dare Rd. and Rt. 17. By the week of the grand opening in September, 1968, 2,500 books had been donated and 1,500 books had been processed. After one year of operation, the library had 700 members and a book circulation of more than 5,000. Donors had contributed 9,000 books to the library and 300 County residents had helped or in some way provided a service to the library. Residents donated 3,000 man-hours to their library.

When they lost their lease, a vacant store was found and the county agreed to pay for rent and utilities. In October, 1971 volunteers finished moving second and third-hand books, shelves and furniture from the old house to the storefront in Grafton Shopping Center. The York County Public Library had begun! In less than two months, while boxes were still being unpacked, membership had doubled and circulation had increased so that volunteer staff could no longer handle the workload. A Library Board of Trustees was appointed by the York County Board of Supervisors in 1976, in accordance with Virginia law, and the State Library support was obtained once local income met state requirements. The purpose of the Board is to oversee library services. The Board has 5 members and meets monthly. Meetings are open to the public. The Friends of the Library organized in 1979, staff was hired, and the size of the building was nearly doubled to 2,500-square-feet. In 1980 2,988 new books and 230 tape cassettes were purchased. In 1981 the first library page was hired-a high school junior who had been voluntarily shelving books after school.

In November of 1981 the people of York County passed a bond referendum to finance an 11,000-square-foot library for around \$1 million. At the time the county's population was 36,000 and the new library was estimated to serve adequately for 15-20 years. At the time the library housed 25,000 items with a circulation of 125,000 items. About 200 members joined the library each year. In 1981 York County residents paid \$21,000 to the City of Williamsburg for library services to Bruton District residents through the Williamsburg Regional Library. Before that York County residents paid \$5 per year to use the Williamsburg Regional Library. Construction on the Yorktown library on Rt. 17 began in September, 1983, and it opened a year later. The land on which the library was built was donated by the O'Hara family of Yorktown. During the first week of business, beginning September 13, 1984, 151 new member cards were issued. York County's library began to experience the advent of the computer age when, in December 1984, the library held its first computer orientation session. In mid-1993 the library installed an automated card catalog. Patrons would no longer have to use the paper-based card catalog system.

In January 1997, the County acquired 11.8 acres of land on Route 134, 5.4 acres of which was dedicated as a future site for an additional library facility. Construction began in September, 1998. On October 9, 1999 the Tabb Library opened to serve patrons at that end of the county. The Tabb Library basically serves the lower end of the county as well as many Hampton and Poquoson residents. The Yorktown Library serves mainly middle county residents, as well as Gloucester and Newport News residents. Although the Tabb library is three times the size of the Yorktown library, they jointly serve the residents of the county with the same services. The Tabb library does house the executive suite of offices, cataloging, and children's departments.